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ABSTRACT

Many teachers in the Sheboygan (Wisconsin) Area School District's alternative programs use principles taught to behavioral disordered students for confronting and handling difficult situations when they must confront other adults in the school system about their concerns and problems. A positive and effective adult confrontation process is outlined comprising ten components: (1) understand the other person's perspective; (2) know your perspective; (3) determine differences in perspectives; (4) isolate the major concern; (5) use a positive introduction; (6) get to the point quickly; (7) respect the other person; (8) control your temper; (9) encourage responses by asking questions; and (10) thank them. The use of positive confrontation when problems arise has increased educational opportunities for the students and reduced tension between the special education teachers and the people with whom they work. Mainstream teachers are more receptive and responsive to their students and administrators are more supportive of their programs. Additionally, students learn from the teachers' example and communications with parents are more effective. Transparencies used during the presentation of this paper are included. (VW)

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ADULTS CONFRONTING ADULTS IN A POSITIVE AND EFFECTIVE MANNER

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Abstract

As teachers of behavioral disordered students, we assist them in confronting and handling difficult situations and people in a positive manner. However, we do not follow our own teachings and find it very difficult to confront other adults about our concerns and problems with them. The end results are long standing personality clashes, grudges, and deep seated conflicts which all interfere with efficient service to behavioral disordered children. This article briefly outlines a positive and effective adult confrontation process used by several alternative programs for behavioral disordered children in the Sheboygan Area School District. The process consists of ten components and a straightforward honest approach to adult conflicts. As a result of positive confrontation, the School District is discovering that open discussions occur more frequently, morale increases, problems are solved before they become deep seated personality clashes, service to students increases, and teamwork becomes common place.

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ADULTS CONFRONTING ADULTS IN A POSITIVE AND EFFECTIVE MANNER

Background

We spend a considerable amount of time and energy helping behavioral disordered children learn to confront and handle difficult situations and people in a positive manner. However, we give almost no attention to assisting adults in confronting other adults positively and effectively. This results in teachers and administrators being unable to overcome personality clashes and problems with peers, parents, and other professionals. Grudges and hostile feelings remain over long periods of time. Ignoring and not confronting these feelings causes problems to intensify and deepen and creates serious roadblocks to effectively serving the needs of behavioral disordered children. Therefore, it is essential that professionals learn to resolve conflicts with each other as quickly as possible and in a positive and effective manner. To illustrate how to confront effectively, we will use an example and briefly outline the components of positive adult confrontation as they are used in the Sheboygan Area School District.

Illustration Example

You are working with a group of behavioral disordered students in your classroom and a regular education teacher barges into the room, holding one of your mainstreamed students (Mark)

by the arm. He says in a very loud voice, "This kid is driving me nuts. All he does is disrupt my class and interfere with kids who really want to learn. He can sit here for the rest of class, and he may return tomorrow. But if he misbehaves, he'll be back again."

The teacher belittled Mark in front of peers, disrupted your class, and probably made you angry. What do you do? Is your reaction passive acceptance, outwardly aggressive, or effectively confrontive? Losing your temper, ignoring the problem, or passively accepting the teacher's actions do nothing to solve the problem, compound it, and create tension between you and the teacher.

You must confront the teacher in a quiet place using a positive, honest, and straightforward approach. "We need to talk about Mark. I know you are frustrated, and so am I. However, I did not appreciate you storming into my class yesterday. It belittled Mark and disrupted my lessons. We need to develop a system which will enable me to support you in dealing with Mark in a positive manner. Why does he make you so angry? What can I do to help?"

Most people will respond appropriately to this approach by entering into a positive dialogue and trying to work with you. However, no matter what happens, do not lose your temper. Maintain your professionalism and eventually most people will respond accordingly.

Components of Positive Confrontation

To assist you in formulating your own positive and effective confrontation techniques, keep in mind the following components:

Prior To The Confrontation

Understand the Other Person's Perspective. Be aware of how the other person views a problem situation. Try to see things through his/her eyes. This reduces your anger and increases your understanding.

Know Your Perspective. Specifically identify your point of view and why you perceive a problem. Know exactly why you are concerned or upset.

Determine Differences in Perspectives. What are the differences between your perspective and the other person's perspective? Understanding the differences will assist you in laying the groundwork for your positive confrontation and will assist in establishing a starting point.

Isolate The Major Concern. Also, to help prepare you for the confrontation, isolate your major concerns. Do not attempt to cover all concerns. Concentrate only on one or two major issues. Depending on the other person's responses, secondary issues may surface and be discussed, but these are not essential for successful positive confrontation.

The Confrontation

Use A Positive Introduction. Begin with one or two positive statements which secure the person's attention and do not turn him/her off or against you. Use a calm, firm, and pleasant voice. This is probably the most crucial step. It sets the tone

for the entire confrontation.

Get To The Point Quickly. You must let the person know your concerns immediately. A direct and honest statement saves time, maintains interest, clearly communicates the presence of a concern, and reduces a wishy-washy or weak perception of you.

Respect The Other Person. Listen to the other person, respect his/her opinion, and demonstrate an interest in his/her point of view, whether you agree or disagree. Then, help him/her view the problem from your perspective. Mutual respect will encourage positive dialogue.

Control Your Temper. Even if the other person becomes angry, do not get into a shouting match. Anger on your part only deepens the problem and accomplishes nothing. Most people will respond appropriately if you maintain an even, assertive, and professional voice quality. They may even apologize to you after they have a few days to think about their unprofessional response to your genuine concerns.

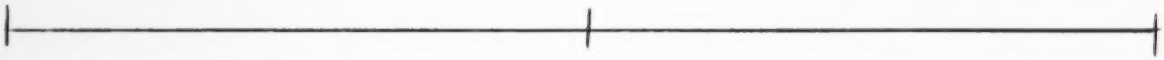
Encourage Responses By Asking Questions. Most people are uncomfortable with confrontation and may not enter into a dialogue. Ask them questions about their perspective, their problems and concerns, and how they are feeling.

Thank Them. Always thank people for their input after the discussion. Even if they lose their tempers, thank them for their time and input. Tell them you are sorry they are angry, but you need to let them know your concerns and how you feel. Your goal in positive confrontation is not necessarily to change them but to openly discuss problems and differences of opinions.

Summary

Using positive confrontation when problems arise will increase educational opportunities for your students and reduce tension between you and the people with whom you work. Mainstream teachers will be more receptive and responsive to your students, and administrators will be more supportive of your efforts. In addition, students will learn from your example, and you will be able to commmunicate more effectively with their parents.

Many of the Sheboygan Area School District's alternative programs utilize the components outlined above. The School District is discovering that the sharing of ideas and perceptions increases communication and respect for one another. Rather than widening gaps between people in conflict, positive and effective confrontation is building bridges, support, and teamwork.



Passive **Assertive** (positive confrontation) **Agressive**

How to show good control:

1. Slow down, think about what is happening.
2. Don't argue or push the issue.
3. Watch your voice level.
4. Be aware of other person's feelings.
5. Be assertive not agressive.

TRANSPARENCIES USED DURING THE PRESENTATION OF THIS PAPER AT THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SEVERE BEHAVIOR DISORDERS OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH
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Adults Confronting Adults

Positively and Effectively

Teach students to:

--Confront difficult situations

--Handle disagreements positively

--Not hold grudges

--Not seek revenge

We do not follow our own teachings.

Results:

-- No resolution of personality clashes

-- Development of grudges

-- Hostile feelings remain over long periods of time

-- Staff morale decreases

-- Proper services to students are reduced

What Do You Do?

--Passive Acceptance

--Outwardly Aggressive

--Effectively Confrontive

Prior To The Confrontation

--Understand other person's perspective

--Know your perspective

--Determine differences in perspective

--Isolate major concern

The Confrontation

--Use positive introduction

-- Get to the point quickly

-- Respect other person

-- Control your temper

-- Encourage responses by asking questions

-- Thank them

Results

--Increase Ed. opportunities for students

--Reduce tension

--Increase morale

--Increase support
- Community
- Peers
- Administration
- Board

--Students will learn from example

--Increase communication

--Decrease emotional drain

--Increase mutual respect

We Must Resolve Our Conflicts With Each Other Through Positive And Effective Confrontation

I DARE YOU

TO TRY

What Do You Have To Lose?